

Coping With Tragedy

The recent attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and the related plane crash in Pennsylvania have left many of us feeling shock, sadness and anger. The sense of helplessness can be overwhelming. You may be wondering how to cope with these tragic events, or if your feelings are normal.

What You May Be Feeling

Everyone reacts to traumatic events in different ways, but there are a number of common reactions following disasters. These may include:

- Sadness, including crying more easily or wanting to cry
- Anger or rage
- Fear
- Guilt, because you're OK and others are not
- Moodiness and irritability
- Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep
- Nightmares, or recurring horrific images
- Changes in appetite—eating too much or not being hungry
- Problems at school or work
- Having a hard time concentrating
- Feelings of helplessness
- Wanting to be alone more than usual—or not wanting to be alone at all

You also may experience physical problems, such as stomachaches, headaches, allergies, rashes, or cold and flu-like symptoms. These are all normal reactions to a traumatic event. As time passes, your feelings and reactions may fade. Keep in mind that this doesn't mean that you no longer care.

Helping You Cope

- **Talk about your feelings**—with friends, family members, a counselor or spiritual leader. Keeping a journal of your thoughts also can help.
- **Give yourself time to heal.** Allow yourself time to mourn the losses you've experienced.
- **Return to your normal routine** as much as possible. Making everyday decisions can help you regain a sense of control.
- **Be kind to other people.** Volunteer to help others in need.
- **Take care of yourself**—get plenty of rest, exercise regularly and eat well-balanced, regular meals.
- **Don't use alcohol or drugs to numb the pain.** They will only slow your healing.
- **Consider postponing major life decisions, if possible.** Activities such as changing jobs or moving to a new location are highly stressful.
- **Spend time with those you love.**
- **Be aware of how news coverage is affecting you.** The images in the news are very powerful. Watching for extended periods of time can be draining and exhausting. Don't feel guilty about taking a break from the news for a while to exercise or do other stress relieving activities.

Ask for Help if You Need It

Many people may be so overcome by the tragedy that they can't cope with it by themselves. If your feelings continue to remain strong, or interfere with your daily living, you may want to seek professional help.

***For emotional support, call Optum® to speak with a caring counselor.
Call 1-800-468-8369—resources are available 24 hours every day.***